

How to Interpret Trees



from the **TREE CITY USA®**
BULLETIN

Interpretation should be considered an important part of any community forestry program. Programs that teach people about trees can have significant impacts both on the individual lives they touch and on support for community tree programs.

What Is Interpretation?

Interpretation is a special form of communication. It has been called attractive communication, or “laymanizing” the technical. Rather than traditional instruction or the presentation of facts, the purpose of interpretation is to reveal meanings and relationships. Sometimes facts help do this, but only if they are a conduit to something larger and more important.

In addition, interpretation must be attractive communication. This is because it is nearly always directed at a non-captive audience. In short, interpretation must be pleasurable, relevant, well-organized, and focused on a specific theme.

Ultimately, the goal of interpretation is to excite interest and to motivate. When done with skill, it may result in the individual wanting more details, in changing an attitude, or even in making some kind of positive change in behavior. Think for a moment about what applications the interpretation of trees could mean for urban and community forestry in your area.

WHAT INTERPRETATION CAN DO

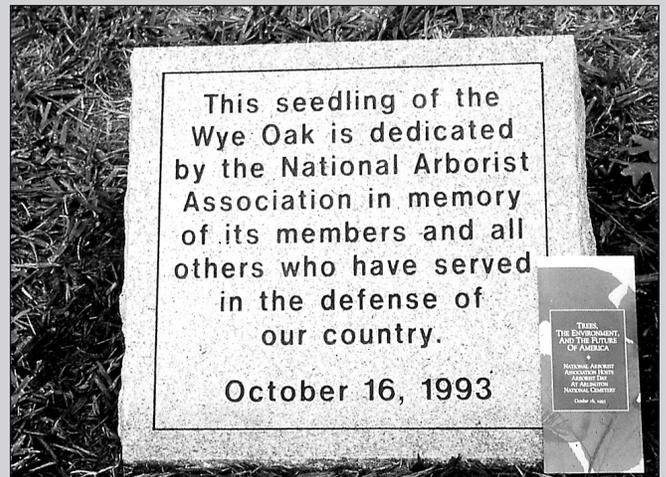
- Create interest in trees and tree care.
- Alert residents to problems facing the community forest.
- Introduce young people to the natural environment.
- Reduce vandalism.
- Foster support for community forestry.
- Provide understanding about urban ecology.
- Increase attendance at tree events.
- Inspire people to read more about trees and tree care.
- Encourage planting more trees.
- Earn points toward a Tree City USA Growth Award for your community.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

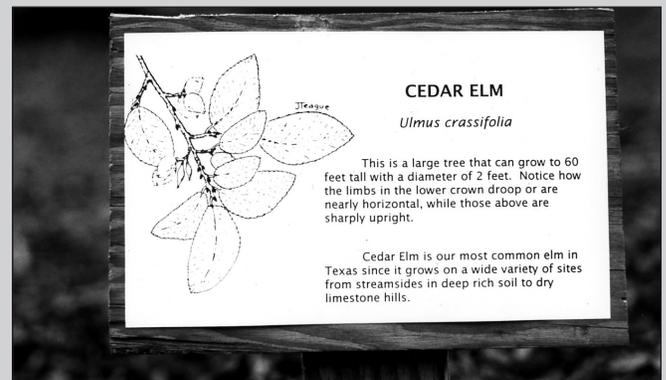
- A checklist to help write better interpretive messages
- Ideas for nature trails
- Various interpretive methods
- And more



An interpretive message is included in this sign. Notice an effort to communicate informally and to make the information interesting and insightful.



This sign provides both the name of the tree and a point of interest.



An attractive, highly legible name label is inexpensive but helpful. This one includes both the common and scientific name of the tree, as well as the logo of the sponsoring organization.